

PRESS RELEASE

NICE issues guidance on use of newer drugs for epilepsy in adults

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) has today issued guidance to the NHS in England and Wales on the use of newer drugs for the treatment of epilepsy in adults.

The NICE guidance recommends that the newer antiepileptic drugs (AEDs) [gabapentin, lamotrigine, levetiracetam, oxcarbazepine, tiagabine, topiramate and vigabatrin] should be used in the management of adults with epilepsy who have not benefited from treatment with the older AEDs (such as carbamazepine or sodium valproate), or where these are unsuitable (for example, because of contraindications, interactions with other drugs or where the person is a woman of childbearing potential). The guidance further recommends that:

- Adults with epilepsy should be treated with just one antiepileptic drug where possible. If the first drug doesn't prevent seizures, another can be tried.
- Adjunctive or combination therapy should only be considered when attempts at monotherapy have not resulted in seizure freedom.
- A careful assessment of the risks and benefits of treatment with individual AEDs should be undertaken, particularly in relation to women of childbearing potential.
- A person who has a seizure for the first time should see an epilepsy specialist as soon as possible, to find out exactly what type of epilepsy he or she has, so that the best treatment can be started.
- Treatment should be reviewed at regular intervals.

Epilepsy, which is a neurological disorder characterised by unprovoked recurring seizures, is the most common serious neurological condition in the UK with an estimated 400,000 people in England and Wales affected by it. Epilepsy is not a

uniform condition, but comprises many different seizure types and epilepsy syndromes.

Drug therapy is the mainstay of management of people with epilepsy, the aim of which is to abolish seizures completely, while at the same time keeping the side effects of treatment to a minimum so that the person can lead as normal a life as possible.

Andrea Sutcliffe, Planning and Resources Director and Executive Lead for the appraisal, said: “By recommending the use of the newer drugs for managing epilepsy in adults, this guidance will help people in England and Wales with this condition to achieve the best possible treatment regimen in terms of improving seizure control and minimizing side effects. The independent Appraisal Committee that advises NICE also highlighted the importance of regular monitoring to review and optimise treatment.”

NICE is also producing guidance on the use of newer drugs for epilepsy in children, due for publication in April 2004. A clinical guideline on the diagnosis, management and treatment of epilepsy, which is being prepared for NICE by the National Collaborating Centre for Primary Care, is due for publication in July 2004.

Ends

For more information contact Phil Ranson on 020 7067 5900, or mobile 0778 639 0068.

Notes to Editors

About NICE guidance

1. NICE follows a process which allows consultees including patients and health professionals to submit evidence, nominate their own experts, be consulted on draft guidance and appeal if they feel the guidance is perverse, that NICE has exceeded its powers or if NICE has not followed the published process for its work.

What is epilepsy?

2. Epilepsy is a neurological disorder characterised by unprovoked recurring seizures.
3. It is the most common serious neurological condition in the UK with an estimated 400,000 people in England and Wales affected by it.
4. An epileptic seizure is a sudden stereotypical episode with changes in motor activity, sensation, behaviour, emotion, memory or consciousness due to an abnormal electrochemical discharge in the brain.

5. Epilepsy is not a uniform condition, but comprises many different seizure types and epilepsy syndromes. The severity of the condition and the prognosis vary according to the type of epilepsy.
6. The condition is also associated with an increase in the risk of premature death; the diagnosis of epilepsy carries an excess mortality that is 2–3 times higher than that of the general population. Those with uncontrolled seizures have the highest excess risk (estimated at 23 times higher in those who had not been seizure-free in the previous year relative to those with controlled seizures).
7. Drug therapy is the mainstay of management of people with epilepsy, the aim of which is to abolish seizures completely, while at the same time keeping the side effects of treatment to a minimum so that the person can lead as normal a life as possible.

What does the NICE guidance on newer drugs for epilepsy in adults say?

8. The newer AEDs (gabapentin, lamotrigine, levetiracetam, oxcarbazepine, tiagabine, topiramate and vigabatrin), within their licensed indications, are recommended for the management of epilepsy in people who have not benefited from treatment with the older AEDs (such as carbamazepine or sodium valproate), or for whom the older AEDs are unsuitable because:
 - There are contraindications to the drugs
 - They could interact with other drugs the person is taking
 - They are already known to be poorly tolerated by the individual
 - The person is of childbearing potential
9. Treatment should be with a single AED (monotherapy) wherever possible.
10. Combination therapy should only be considered when attempts at monotherapy have not resulted in seizure freedom.
11. In women of childbearing potential, the possibility of interaction with oral contraceptives and the risk of the drugs causing harm to an unborn child should be discussed and an assessment made as to the risks and benefits of treatments with individual drugs. Specific caution is advised in the use of sodium valproate because of the risk of harm to the unborn child.
12. All people having a first seizure should be seen as soon as possible by a specialist in the management of the epilepsies to ensure prompt and early diagnosis and initiation of therapy as appropriate to their needs.
13. Treatment should be reviewed at regular intervals

A quick reference version of the guidance is available on the NICE website at www.nice.org.uk/TA075quickrefguide. The full guidance is also available on the NICE website at www.nice.org.uk/TA075guidance

About NICE

14. NICE is part of the NHS. It is the independent organisation responsible for providing national guidance on treatments and care for those using the NHS in England and Wales. Its guidance is for healthcare professionals and patients and their carers to help them make decisions about treatment and healthcare. For further information about NICE you can visit www.nice.org.uk.
15. NICE produces guidance in three areas of health:
 - the use of new and existing medicines and treatments within the NHS in England and Wales – technology appraisals.

- the appropriate treatment and care of patients with specific diseases and conditions within the NHS in England and Wales – clinical guidelines.
 - whether interventional procedures used for diagnosis or treatment are safe enough and work well enough for routine use – interventional procedures.
16. NICE also funds three enquiries that undertake research into the way patients are treated to identify ways of improving the quality of care (the investigations are known as confidential enquiries).
17. NICE guidance and recommendations are prepared by independent groups that include professionals working in the NHS and people who are familiar with the issues affecting patients and carers.